

This bill would require quarterly reports on the costs of the EHRM program. It would also capture the roughly \$5 billion of costs the Inspector General found were unaccounted for and any other costs that VA has not been including.

Of course, cost is not everything. The electronic health record program needs to help the VA medical staff better care for veterans. That is why this bill would also require VA to report on performance and safety metrics. These data points will allow us to evaluate the program and determine whether it is making VA medical centers safer, faster, and better.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the bipartisan work of the Technology Modernization Subcommittee, and I am also pleased to be the original cosponsor of this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all of my colleagues to support H.R. 4591, as amended, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. MRVAN), who is my good friend and a member of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs and chairman of the Subcommittee on Technology Modernization.

Mr. MRVAN. Mr. Speaker, I thank Chairman TAKANO for yielding me time.

Mr. Speaker, earlier this year the VA Office of the Inspector General released two separate reports highlighting VA's failure to conduct reliable lifecycle cost estimates for its Electronic Health Record Modernization program.

Specifically, the IG repeatedly found unreliable and incomplete estimates for infrastructure upgrades and costs as well as inadequate reporting of those costs.

Given the size and scope of the EHRM program, the lack of accurate cost estimates hampers VA's ability to provide Congress with an accurate picture of the cost and scale of efforts to modernize IT and physical infrastructure at VA medical centers.

This piece of legislation will address these issues. It requires VA to look at all costs across VHA, OIT, and any other programs for any amount expended on the EHRM program, including for infrastructure projects and contractors that were not part of the original contract. This legislation also requires VA to provide the committee with reports on performance metrics and outcomes.

I thank Chairman TAKANO and Ranking Member BOST for their leadership and for cosponsoring this legislation as well as all of the other cosponsors and the committee members who have truly made this a bipartisan effort.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage my colleagues to support this bill.

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Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I encourage all of my colleagues to support this bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I ask all of my colleagues to join me in passing H.R. 4591, the VA Electronic Health Record Transparency Act of 2021, as amended, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 4591, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

The title of the bill was amended so as to read: "A bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to submit to Congress periodic reports on the costs, performance metrics, and outcomes of the Department of Veterans Affairs Electronic Health Record Modernization program."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

VITAL ASSESSMENT ACT

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5516) to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to submit to Congress a report on the Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership program of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 5516

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "VITAL Assessment Act".

SEC. 2. VETERANS INTEGRATION TO ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP PROGRAM OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) REPORT.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate a report on the Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership program of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The report shall include the following:

(1) The number of medical centers of the Department, institutions of higher learning, non-college degree programs, and student veterans supported by the program, and relevant trends since the program began.

(2) The staff and resources allocated to the program, and relevant trends since the program began.

(3) An assessment of the outcomes and effectiveness of the program in—

(A) supporting student veterans;

(B) connecting student veterans to needed services of the Department or services provided by non-Department entities;

(C) addressing the mental health needs of student veterans;

(D) lowering the suicide risk of student veterans; and

(E) helping student veterans achieve educational goals.

(4) An assessment of barriers to expanding the program and how the Secretary intends to address such barriers.

(5) An assessment of whether the program should be expanded outside of the Office of

Mental Health and Suicide Prevention to support students veterans with needs unrelated to mental health or suicide.

(b) UNIFORM BEST PRACTICES, GOALS, AND MEASURES.—The Secretary shall establish best practices, goals, and measures for the Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership program of the Department that are uniform among the medical centers of the Department.

(c) OUTREACH.—The Secretary shall conduct outreach among the Armed Forces, veterans service organizations, institutions of higher learning, and non-college degree programs with respect to the Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership program of the Department.

(d) ASSESSMENT.—The Secretary shall assess the feasibility and advisability of including the suicide rate for student veterans in the National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report of the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention of the Department.

(e) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) The term "institution of higher learning" has the meaning given that term in section 3452 of title 38, United States Code.

(2) The term "student veteran" means the following:

(A) A veteran or member of the Armed Forces using educational assistance under any of the following provisions of law:

(i) Chapter 30, 31, 32, or 33 of title 38, United States Code, or chapter 1606 or 1607 of title 10, United States Code.

(ii) Section 116 of the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017 (Public Law 115-48; 38 U.S.C. 3001 note).

(iii) Section 8006 of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (Public Law 117-2; 38 U.S.C. 3001 note prec.).

(B) A veteran who is enrolled in an institution of higher learning or other training program, without regard to whether the veteran is using educational assistance specified in subparagraph (A).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. BOST) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and to insert extraneous material on H.R. 5516, as amended.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 5516, the VITAL Assessment Act, as amended, which is sponsored by our newest House Veterans' Affairs Committee member, Congressman ELLZEY.

This bill requires that VA submit a report on the Department's Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership, or VITAL program. VITAL is designed to support student veterans in their academic settings, and it is a key component of VA's work to ensure that veterans thrive after completing their military service.

VITAL is a longtime program at VA, and this report will provide a timely

opportunity to examine outcomes for student veterans and academic institutions supported by VA.

I urge my colleagues to vote “yes” on H.R. 5516, the VITAL Assessment Act, as amended, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 5516, as amended, the VITAL Assessment Act.

This bill is sponsored by, as was said, our newest member of the Veterans’ Affairs Committee, Congressman JAKE ELLZEY. With this bill, he is fulfilling the promise he made on the campaign trail to put the needs of our fellow veterans front and center. His bill will make a number of improvements to the VA’s Veterans Integration to Academic Learning, or the VITAL program.

VITAL provides mental health support to student veterans on college campuses. Preventing veteran suicide and supporting veterans as they transition out of the military are two of our committee’s highest goals, and this bill would get us closer to realizing both of them.

I urge every Member to support H.R. 5516, as amended, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers and I am prepared to close. I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. ELLZEY), the main sponsor of this legislation.

Mr. ELLZEY. Mr. Speaker, I thank Ranking Member BOST for yielding time.

Mr. Speaker, it is an honor to be addressing the House today as we are just days removed from Veterans Day, when our Nation recognizes those who honorably served to protect our precious, God-given liberties and freedoms. We have a duty and responsibility to help the veterans of our Armed Forces who have fought to preserve our freedoms and liberties.

In 2011, VA launched the Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership program, or the VITAL program, to provide mental health services to student veterans on college campuses.

Hundreds of thousands of veterans attend college every year. They often have difficulty adjusting from the military to an academic campus culture and relating to nonveteran peers.

As someone who has personally gone through the transition back to civilian life, I can say my experiences in combat and leadership were vastly different than the experiences of my fellow students. I was much older than my fellow students; much older. I was no longer surrounded by my fellow warriors; and I was a stranger in a strange academic land. For these reasons, I understand why the VITAL program is so important.

Since its inception in 2011, it has grown to support student veterans at 183 locations. VITAL program services

are locally managed, staffed, and evaluated by VA medical centers working with area schools, which allows for independence and flexibility. It connects student veterans with needed care and services, and helps prevent veteran suicide.

The VITAL Assessment Act will ensure critical information about the VITAL program is gathered, improvements are made, and will help provide mental healthcare and support to student veterans.

This act adds accountability and transparency. It will require the VA to report to Congress about the program’s management, operations, and effectiveness in support of student veterans’ mental health and educational goals.

It also requires the VA to use information gathered to create best new practices, goals, and performance measures for the program.

In conclusion, I thank the many veterans’ groups supporting this bill.

I am grateful to House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs Ranking Member BOST for being an original cosponsor of this bill.

And I thank Chairman TAKANO for supporting this bill and speaking favorably during the committee hearing; Health Subcommittee Chair BROWNLEY, and the members of the Veterans’ Affairs Committee for their unanimous support of this bill.

This will help student veterans achieve their goals and dreams. And just as the VITAL program has a proven record of saving lives, this bill will further improve the program and help save even more lives of veterans.

I ask all Members of the House to please support H.R. 5516.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to close, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to close. I encourage all of my colleagues to support this bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I ask all of my colleagues to join me in passing H.R. 5516, as amended, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 5516, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

BURN PIT REGISTRY ENHANCEMENT ACT

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2433) to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to take actions necessary to ensure that certain individuals may update the burn pit registry with a registered individual’s cause of death, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.
The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 2433

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Burn Pit Registry Enhancement Act”.

SEC. 2. BURN PIT REGISTRY UPDATES.

(a) INDIVIDUALS ELIGIBLE TO UPDATE.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall take actions necessary to ensure that the burn pit registry may be updated with the cause of death of a deceased registered individual by—

(A) an individual designated by such deceased registered individual; or

(B) if no such individual is designated, an immediate family member of such deceased registered individual.

(2) DESIGNATION.—The Secretary shall provide, with respect to the burn pit registry, a process by which a registered individual may make a designation for purposes of paragraph (1)(A).

(b) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) The term “burn pit registry” means the registry established under section 201 of the Dignified Burial and Other Veterans’ Benefits Improvement Act of 2012 (Public Law 112-260; 38 U.S.C. 527 note).

(2) The term “immediate family member”, with respect to a deceased individual, means—

(A) the spouse, parent, brother, sister, or adult child of the individual;

(B) an adult person to whom the individual stands in loco parentis; or

(C) any other adult person—

(i) living in the household of the individual at the time of the death of the individual; and

(ii) related to the individual by blood or marriage.

(3) The term “registered individual” means an individual registered with the burn pit registry.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. BOST) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and to insert extraneous material on H.R. 2433.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the passage of Representative RUIZ’s Burn Pit Registry Enhancement Act.

As the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs and our Senate counterparts close in on providing much-needed, comprehensive assistance to veterans exposed to burn pits and other airborne hazards, this measure from Dr. RUIZ is an important step in the right direction.

As VA continues to study the effects that burn pit and other airborne hazard